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HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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THE MERCIFULNESS OF THE BIBLE.

“The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes.”—
Psalm cxix. 64.

The statutes meant here, and so often in this long psalm, are evidently the sacred writings then existing, which purported to interpret the laws and commands of God. You will observe, not alone in this 64th verse, which I have read, but all the way through this 119th Psalm, and throughout all the Psalms, the intimate connection which existed between sacred Scripture and the natural world, or material globe.

In some sense, the Old Testament may be called a book of intense enthusiasm (using that expression in the modern philosophic sense). It has an eye to the phenomena of nature, and to their economic and moral uses. It is a book that constantly goes out of itself, as it were, into its surroundings; and it is significantly called *a light*.

Now, no man lights a lamp for the sake of seeing the lamp. We should think him a singular student who, lighting his lamp, should occupy himself in unscrewing it, and peeping in to see what was in it; with tinkering at the wick; with working at the shade; with taking it up and setting it down; with defending it from millers—thus devoting himself wholly to the lamp. On the contrary, he forgets it. He takes it, to read by it something that is not a lamp. It is the book, it is the picture, it is the room, it is the child, it is the friend, it is the life which is going on, that the light reveals. It reveals the nature that is outside of it; and its value consists in its giving a true interpretation.

The Psalmist says:

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”

What he means by that, it is easy to discern, when we see how the light of the Word—the Old Testament Scripture—judges of the affairs of nations; of the beauties of the heavens and of the earth;

of the processes of the seasons ; of the methods of divine providence towards animals and towards men. He is in living, vital sympathy with life everywhere in the great world outside of him ; and he takes the Bible, as a man would take a lamp into a room to see what was in it. For, in those old times, they did not shut God up so close as we do. He lived outside of the Church, and all things were his, and his providence extended over all creation, and his Word was the interpretation thereof. It was the interpretation of science, and of all those elements out of which science springs.

The particular passage which I have selected, I have chosen for the sake of the one word, *mercy*, that is in it.

“The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes.”

The implication is that the earth is interpreted by God’s statutes. It is as if David had said, “The world, with its affairs, its processes, as I now see them in the light of thy Word, is full of thy mercy.”

You will have noticed (for I read a portion of this chapter in the preliminary service) how constantly he goes back to the knowledge of the statutes—the Word. How beautiful they are ! How strong they are ! What a refuge they are ! How comforting they are ! How sweet they are !

I hear some people still talk in that way about the Bible. I still hear some people talk about the mercifulness of the Bible—the subject that I am going to speak upon this morning. I hear some people still talking about the Bible in the light of its comfort and sweetness and beauty. But I think the number is diminishing. I think there is a great deal more of fighting for the Bible than there is of using it. There are a great many more persons anxious about the inspiration of the Bible than there are about the spirit that is in it. There are a great many more zealous for the maintenance of the Book than there are for its daily comforting use. It is the one book that I think the world cannot afford to lose. And it crowds out no other. It gives value to all books that tend toward the truth. It is in affinity with everything that is bright and beautiful in the Church, and out of the Church, and throughout all creation. The Word of God is a kind of atmosphere in which all things exist, and which throws a light upon all things that are, or are to be ; and it is the one book which we cannot afford to lose out of the treasures of human life.

And yet, it is very much lost out, if by *losing* you mean, not the annihilation of the book, but the not using it, or the unwise use of it. When it has been used, in the majority of cases it has been used in a wrong spirit, and for purposes which it did not at all con-

temple; so that it has become repugnant to men, and is permitted to lie quietly aside. There are many persons who, when they become pious, think it to be their duty to read the Bible; and they read it, not because they enjoy it particularly, but because they feel that they ought to, according to the regulation practice.

A man is a Christian. What does that mean? Well, that he has joined the church, and keeps Sunday (and keeping Sunday means that he should not ride out, nor write business letters, but go to church, and sleep as comfortably as he can), behaves himself everywhere with method, and without much outbreak, reads a chapter in the Bible every morning at family prayers, and attends certain meetings through the week.

Now and then I find a man who makes the Bible a companion. Once in a while I come across a person who is lonesome without it. If you go down from people who are intelligent and cultured and prospered in worldly things, to those who are poor, and bear yokes and troubles, you will find that the Bible is more and more used. People low down in life, and unfortunate in their affairs, if they are virtuous and moral, find some comfort, they do not know why, in reading the Bible. People in distress, people living alone, people with whom the world is going very hard, often find much in the Bible that parallels their experience, in the words of the old Psalmist, and they say, "If it had not been for the strength that I got from the Word of God, I do not know how I should have struggled through;" but that, I fear, is not the prevalent use of the Bible, or the spirit in which men look at it. It has been very largely employed for destructive purposes. Its texts have been wrested from their true meaning. I sometimes think it is like a forest, which is most beautiful for abode, most attractive to the eye, most delightful to all the senses, but into which men go with axes, hewing down boughs and trunks, and squaring them, and building them into houses, and even forts; so that although they have houses and forts, they no longer have any forest, because the trees have been hewn down, and squared to the rule and measure, until the grace and beauty and freedom of life which belongs to their nature is gone.

I have preached several sermons lately on the subject of the Bible; and I purpose to dwell a little, this morning, on one particular quality of the Word of God—its mercifulness. The genius of the Scriptures is mercifulness. I am not speaking of the spirit which it inculcates in you and me. What I wish to emphasize is, that the Bible has been constructed in such a way that it is an armory of mercy—a magazine of kindness. It is a great institution of mercifulness.

The first point I make, is the mercifulness of its eminent secularity, united to tendencies towards eminent spirituality. If you read the treatises that have been drawn mostly from the Scriptures as to how to live right, how to lead an eminent Christian life, you will discern how very different is the genius of their structure from that of the Scriptures themselves; how they almost invariably pitch upon the higher moods of the mind the second, third and fourth degrees of development which have taken place in the understanding, and upon the distinctively religious emotions; and how, in order to meet any contrary sequence, the spiritual life is evolved too much on this higher, and, I might almost say, supernatural plane.

In the Word of God, you find no such structure of peculiarities. The Bible is a book of business, from beginning to end. It is a book in which a man, although his thoughts touch some of the pinnacles of the New Jerusalem, stands with his feet on the ground. Good, sound, homely earth is under every man's feet who walks through the Word of God. It is a book of this world, about this world, about the things which men think of in this world, and about the temptations which beset us in this world, from day to day.

The Old Testament, particularly, is a book whose construction has in view, all the way through, not exclusively, but primarily, the foundation of the higher development and of the happy condition of men in this world. The Old Testament is a book of farming. It is a book of political economy. It is a book full of maxims of thrift. It is a book whose sanctions turn on worldly prosperity or adversity, connecting the one and the other with godliness and with righteous living.

Take, for instance, the direction to the child, "Honor thy father and thy mother." Why? That it may please God? Undoubtedly he ought to do it for that reason; but that was not the reason that was given—"that it may be well with thee;" "that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Natural duties, springing from natural affections, are inculcated on grounds of worldly advantage. We live in an age in which disinterestedness is interpreted in such a way that men think it is not right to do any great thing with any consideration of its earthly effect. Not so the Word of God. From the beginning all through, it recognizes that in this world the duties which belong to life must be done with a wise consideration of the effects produced on earth. The Bible, therefore, at the foundation, has a world-life.

I know of no such collection of wisdom in relation to the present

life, no such insight into motives and character, no discriminations so far-reaching and penetrating, as "The Proverbs," as they are called, "of Solomon"—which are mostly his. That little book alone is invaluable. Though I do not regard it as so high-toned or so spiritual as many passages of the New Testament Scriptures, yet, as a part of an organized whole, it is without a parallel. And a man who should take the Proverbs of Solomon in his vest pocket (for they may be carried there: they have been printed in a pretty little volume which can be carried in the vest pocket)—a man who should take these Proverbs, and make himself acquainted with them, would, I think, find more wisdom in them for daily life in the family, in the street, in the shop, on the ship, in the store, in the factory, than anywhere else. They may be carried with a man into his pleasure, into his business, into his politics, everywhere. You will find more homely, practical wisdom, bearing directly on everyday life, in that little book than in any other treatise that has ever come from the mind of man.

Nor is this all. Because, when you go on to the New Testament, the nature of the sanctions rises and becomes higher, it does not follow that the others fail. They continue secular sanctions; but something is added to them in the New Testament, without taking out of them at all the worldly effects of right-living. For we find in the New Testament such passages as this, covering the whole ground:

"Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

Therefore, in the most glowing epistles, in almost every one of the immortal letters of the apostles, where the highest sentiments abound, where imagination and faith act their noblest parts, you shall find that the outcome is to show how to reduce elevated thoughts, spiritual emotions and knowledges, to a practical use in daily life. Be courteous, be industrious, be careful, are specifications that are made over and over again in the New Testament.

Now, this is because human life is God's grand ordinance of education. Human life contains within itself special schools. The Church is a school; and the various institutions connected with it are schools; but they are parts of universal society; and human society, with its industries, its ambitions, its domestic relations, its higher moral provisions—the sum total of human society—organized mankind—is the grand school in which men are developed. There is something developed in connection with every part of necessary duty in human society. The relation of industry, and profits, and economies, and civil affairs, runs through the Old Testament

and the New; and they have a direct relation to moral states as well.

Now, with such secular conditions, we must mark the fact that there have sprung up men who have given the world its deepest religious views, and its most intense moral impulses. Under the training of such Scriptures have come up men of the noblest stamp. The Old Testament, some say, is a book whose level is very low, and whose sanctions are all worldly, whose motive is policy rather than principle, and profit rather than disinterestedness, and whose structure was best adapted to the earlier periods of life and the lower forms of human society; and yet, under the influence and training of that book, and the institutions to which it has given rise, have sprung those very moral natures that have gone deepest and risen highest. The old Psalmist, the old prophets, the old Hebrew minds, which even the most skeptical writers of our day recognize as being to moral ideas what Greek life was to intellectual ideas, and what Roman life was to organized governmental ideas—these were men trained according to the teachings of the Old Testament. And if men say that the Bible is a mere book of policy, I say that men brought up under the influence of the Bible have developed the highest intellectual and moral dispositions, and are the leaven of the moral life of the world to-day.

This is not an accident. It is such a tempering of duty in secularity that it leads to moral culture, and that moral culture again deepens men's natures; and out of their deeper natures come profounder views of God; and men are competent to receive new light, and to develop that which is material and domestic and secular, as a condition of that unfolding of higher views which leads to the full blaze and glory of the spiritual life that is depicted in the New Testament.

The temporal and secular element of the Scriptures, therefore, tends to the growth of the great ideal of manhood. The whole system of secular life and duty, so employed as to bring out of it a higher spiritual life, is an eminent instance of great wisdom and mercifulness in dealing with a race that could not have been dealt with in any other way. And when, by and by, philosophy shall have shown that the human race develop, not downward from a perfect manhood, but upward from the lower rudiments of manhood, we may hope for better results. It is not necessary that we should suppose men to have come from the lower animal creation. When you take Agassiz' view, that men were created by an intelligent Mind, but at a low or seminal point, and that then they unfolded gradually to what they have become; when the world and the church

take that ground, the first feeling will be that it tends to destroy religion. It will destroy the misinterpretation and misunderstanding of religion, just so soon as men begin to admit that the human race has been developed from lower savage and barbarian conditions.

That is the divine method. It is the economy of the Old and New Testaments. It is the process of divine wisdom in visible creation. You will find that that which is apparent in God's outward government is also shown in the developments of the Old Testament Scriptures. They took man, as an emerging creature, from a lower stage, and adapted all their instructions to that lower stage, pressing him upward. Man, being sensuous, the Old Testament dealt with him sensuously; and man, being also social, it dealt with him socially. Under the old Mosaic system they ate, and danced, and laughed, and sang, for religious purposes. When that system was in vogue, the instrumentalities which were employed were adapted to the social line which men had reached, still pressing them upward. And as they rose to a higher economic condition, so their views and institutions began to take a wider sweep, until, in the fullness of time, the light broke out completely, and man stood divulged as a spiritual being, riding on an animal body, but with full light and glory and immortality, as it came out in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The facts of human development will be found paralleled by precisely analogical facts contained in the Old Testament; and instead of these views throwing out the Word of God, they are going to corroborate it, and make it more and more apparently divine and wise.

Next, I mention the mercifulness of Scripture in using the highest ideal of life in such a manner as not to oppress the great mass of mankind. There is no despotism so little suspected, none so real, and I think none so cruel, as the despotism of the ideal. The glory and benefit of man consist in his capacity to have an ideal—that is to say, a perception of perfection in any direction to which he gives his mind. What we mean by *an ideal* is a fact, or a career, or an enterprise, or an object, or a character—anything which a man thinks of, carried up to a condition in which it will be perfect as contrasted with what it is now.

I go into the wood, and find the sloe—a miserable bitter plum; and I say to myself, “By successive sowings of the seeds of this fruit of the wilderness, and by successive selections for planting of the seeds of those trees which are the most vigorous, and of which the leaves are the most succulent, I shall get something better than the sloe. I see in my mind a luscious plum. That is my ideal.” Accordingly, I take seeds of the sloe, and plant them; and I pick

out seeds of the best trees which *they* produce, and plant them ; and I take seeds from the best trees which they produce, and plant them ; and so on, having in my mind the Bolivar plum, or the Washington plum, or some other fine fruit ; and I am working from the miserable sloe of the forest up toward this ideal. It is a perfect plum that I have in my mind ; and I am approaching it.

A man takes a dog-rose of the wood, and says to himself, "I can imagine that this rose might be so perfected, that it might be so enlarged, that its petals might be so multiplied and so packed one on the other, as to form a shell or cup ; and I can imagine that it might be made to possess an exquisite and delightful fragrance." He has in his mind the picture of a rose to which this rude flower might be brought by successive cultures, sowing and selecting, sowing and selecting, until perfection was reached. And he commences and carries on this process in his mind until he has Hebe's cup, or some other of the most beautiful of roses. The ideal is perfect, that hangs in the man's conception.

Now, men have some such ideals in regard to their own progress. Their ambition is to have a better house, and a better life. Men bear suffering and sorrow for the sake of living in ampler circumstances. We are seeking for the realization of an ideal of national life, of family life, and of individual life. We are in transit toward that ideal. The whole world is aiming at it. We are not given to Asiatic contentment. We are not satisfied with things as they are. The maxim, that if the father was a miller the son will be a miller, is not suited to the spirit of our times. It is not true that if the father lived in a miserable one-room hut the son should have no aspiration for anything better.

A man born and bred on the New England hills lives in a little insignificant house which was once red, but from which the color has been well-nigh washed by winter and summer storms. For twenty years he has lived and slept in one inconvenient room. A child is born in that house ; and as soon as he comes to years of discretion, he says to himself, "I am going out into life to make my fortune." He has no idea of what a man's fortune is, but he has an impulse to do something by which he may become stronger, and larger, and wiser, and richer, and more potential, than his father has been. It is a sense of aspiration that is moving him. And so there are ideals, conceptions, perceptions, along the various lines of human development, physical, social, political, and religious.

This ideal is the glory of the world. It is the morning-star that tempts men on. Without it, the race stagnates, and the world is a pestilent, miasmatic swamp ; but with it, the world is perpetually

growing purer, and the race is aspiring to new forms, and higher levels, and nobler accomplishments.

So then, the ideal is a thing for which we are to be thankful; and yet it is one of those instruments of oppression which has brought almost as much torment into the world as the Inquisition itself ever did. Let us look at it.

For instance, one of the ways in which the ideal afflicts men is that which is seen when conceptions of life and character develop themselves. The most favored in the world catch quickest the inspiration of an ideal, and the less favored are longer in catching it, or do not catch it at all.

When the sun rises in Switzerland, the highest points of the mountains take its rays first—two or three hours before they reach the valleys below. So ideals are taken by the highest natures first. If they reflected the ideals as the mountains reflect the light of the sun, it would be all right. If, as the peasant, far down in the valley, is cheered by the sunlight, not because it strikes him, but because he sees it away up yonder, men of the lowest natures were encouraged by the ideals which they see reflected from men of the highest natures, then those ideals would be generally beneficial. But, ordinarily, men who have better ideas of philosophy and right living unite themselves by affinity, and separate themselves from their fellow-men, that they may enjoy the luxury of their refinement and culture; and they become, as it were, monopolists, and look down from their elevation with a sort of un pitying and hard contempt upon those who are below them. As men rise in life, and conceive higher ideals of living, they are apt to segregate together at the top of society, and cover it over with a luminous crust, and leave all who are beneath them unilluminated, unhelped, unsympathized with.

By-the-by, I may say that this exclusive use of the ideal drew out from Christ the bitterest denunciations he ever uttered. He did not denounce the harlot and the thief; they did not need denunciation; the universal conscience denounced them: but the men of eminent culture, the men of great property, the men who had received the highest ideals of civic, social, and philosophic life, who segregated themselves, and refused to sympathize with men below them, and oppressed them, and put burdens upon them—these men Christ denounced. He denounced the selfishness of culture as less excusable and more guilty than that of lust or passion.

But that is not all, nor half. Not only does the ideal, being received, lead men to segregate themselves into exclusive classes that intercept the light rather than transmit it to those below them, but it leads them to frame it into a rule of life so high and rigorous that not one man in a million can reach it.

Consider what is the effect in a school of putting a dull boy, a boy conscientious and earnest, but slow-moulded and slow-minded, into a class all the members of which are far beyond him, the class going on easily, and he taxing himself to the utmost, but still hanging behind, goaded or dragged, and in either case oppressed and wronged. Two hounds well mated can run together all day ; but suppose, instead of putting two hounds together, you should put together a goat and a hound, to run all day. The goat might keep up with the hound, but it would wear him out. Who ever drove a pair of horses that he did not find one less fast than the other ; that he did not find one dull and the other bright ; that he did not find it necessary to keep touching the dull one as if he were in fault for that which was no fault of his ; that he did not find that the bright horse did without urging what he had continually to urge the other to do ?

In life you may make it a rule that what is facile to men of genius becomes fatal to men who are without genius. If you set an example of living before men which is easy to those who are largely cultured and fully developed, it becomes impossible to men who are in the very opposite condition. You must make your ideal the same to all men ; but somewhere or other there must be elasticity. That ideal must be followed by each grade, according to their ability to follow it, and not according to the ability of those who are above them.

Take, for instance, the first systematic and universal development which was made of religious truth ; which was false in many respects on account of its combinations, and on account of the dynamism or emphasis which it gave to the different divine attributes. It represented the governmental element of God, and the whole universe as his lawful prey. Nevertheless, it exalted the moral nature, it exalted conscience, it exalted the sense of obligation to God ; and it made righteousness terribly glorious, while it made sin fearfully dangerous. It presented an ideal that, meeting the mass of mankind, overwhelmed them. The Augustan system, as a mere speculation in philosophy, I quite admire—as I do the Sphinx in Egypt. Many carvings have come down to us from Athens which I admire ; but I would not say my prayers to them, though they are admirable in themselves. Calvinism is so wrought out that every joint is perfect and every part is perfectly fitted to every other part. It is a charming system in these respects ; but when you hold it up as a view of God that men are to pray to and put their trust in, it is not so charming. Calvinism, as it is constructed and developed, is not a system of remedial mercy, but quite the opposite, and in that regard is as unscrip-

tural and false as it can be ; and yet Calvinism has always been a tremendous power for civilization. It has stirred men up amazingly. It is precisely adapted to men with great reasoning and moral faculties. It takes such men, and fashions them into noble specimens of the human race. And historians and advocates of Calvinism say, "Look at the men who have grown up in this system. Look at the champions of Calvinism in Scotland and mid-Europe. Wherever you have found the Calvinistic theology and Calvinistic churches, there you have been sure to find sturdy, heroic men." I say so, too. The point that I make against Calvinism is, that it takes men of ideology, of taste, of a higher moral nature, and fashions them into a tremendous class, overleaping the great multitude of men who cannot rise intellectually or esthetically or morally to the ideal which it holds up. It sacrifices a million men to make one ! Is that the spirit of the Gospel ? Is that the spirit of God ? Is that the spirit of him who came down to earth, and died to save men who were in sin and were his enemies ? A God who predetermines, from eternity, the damnation of unutterable millions ; a God that created the world to pour into the eternal sphere endless woes and tribulations—that is the God of Calvinism. Is that the God that is represented by him who gave up his life rather than that the lowest and the least should suffer ? But looking at it, not theologically, but purely in a philosophical point of view, its mischief consists, not in its being a misrepresentation of God merely, but in its being a presentation of God and of divinity which, while adapted to the powerful, the highest, the aristocracy, was oppressive to the less favored. The great mass of men could not bear to be screwed up to the requisitions of such a system, as the rule of life. Thus, while it made remarkable men of a few, it crushed all the rest. These heroes of the higher faith were nourished on the blood of millions of men who were sacrificed to that faith !

The same thing is continually going on now. Take the life and writings of Jonathan Edwards. No man can tell how much we are indebted to him, for raising the style of thought, and for introducing into intellectual discussion an element which will not be expended when you and I and our children are dead, and long ages have passed by. And yet, if you take *Edwards on the Affections*, and read it, you will find it one of the most searching, and scourging, and discouraging of books. I think that if the Angel Gabriel were sent down to this world, and should read *Edwards on the Affections*, he would hang his harp on the willow, and think he was one of the reprobates, and had no right to be saved ! The discriminations

in that book are very nice, the insight is extraordinary, the scope is remarkable, the aggregation is wonderful ; but it is almost fatal to read it conscientiously, and with implicit belief in it ; because the ideal which it makes of a perfect Christian experience is such as not one man in a million—and then not he—can ever reach. That is the ideal which it holds up, and it says, “This is what God expects us to be.” And by way of confirmation, the declaration is quoted that “the Word of God is quick, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Yes, but what is the inference? “Naked and open are we before him with whom we have to do” ; “let us, therefore, come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” It is here an argument of trust ; but where it has been presented, as in Edwards’ writings, and by his school, and where men are held rigidly to the ideal, I say it is an oppression. It is using an ideal so as to make it a despotism to those who are too low down to reach it. Under such circumstances, there is no compassion in it.

This is generally the effect, too, of the Lives of good men—of Page, of Martyn, of Brainard, of Edward Payson, and of other eminent men whose biographies we have. In the first place, they generally give us nothing but the cream. They skim them. And then they usually churn the cream to butter. And then they make that up into little charming rolls, with the stamp of the church on them. And those are served out to men, as specimens of what they are expected to be ! I suppose, if we were to be apportioned off to our different follies, it would take me ten years to repent of my folly in trying to be what I never was cut out to be. I tried to be several of those men, when I was a young man. I tried my very hardest to be Brainard ; and I should have succeeded, if God had not fixed it so that I could not. I tried to be Payson ; but Payson was dyspeptic, and I was not. I tried to be Henry Martyn, and wanted to be a missionary, and sit under a tree in Persia, and say the things that he said, and think the things that he thought. In Amherst, I tried and strove to live up to these ideals, but I could not do it. Who would think of pouring out on his plate mustard, and vinegar, and pepper, and such things, and making a dinner of them ? These things are good to wake up and quicken the appetite, but are not to be used as steady food ; and so these lives are good as examples for the purpose of stimulation, but they are to be used with discrimination. No man is to sit before any of these ideals for his portrait. You might as well send your neighbor to the pho-

tographer's to sit for your picture, or to the tailor to be measured for your clothes, because it is not convenient for you to go, as to take for your pattern of life men who are themselves, but not you. Principles and truths are given to us for our direction ; but men are to grow as the trees do. The peach-tree grows like a peach-tree, the poplar like a poplar, the oak like an oak, the cedar like a cedar, and the spruce like a spruce ; and God hath given to every man the form that pleaseth him. In the wealth of divine conception, a great variety of minds have been given to men ; and every man should be well enough acquainted with himself to know how to follow the line of God's creative wisdom as expressed in him.

Now, ideals, held up by treatises, by systematic views of Christianity, or biographical representations that are too high and too difficult of attainment for the mass of mankind, become despotic. I am, in my own ministry, perpetually obliged to release men from the despotism of high ideals.

Take the ideal in regard to one's sense of sinfulness. A man is asked if he ever had it. He says, "No, I never did." "Do you say that you have never been under a conviction of sin?" "No, sir, I have not." "Have you never, at the close of the day, felt the greatest annoyance and disappointment because you had falsified almost every one of the maxims of the Bible?" "Oh, yes, I have felt that." "Have you never felt so disturbed by your temper that you were dissatisfied with yourself, and unhappy?" "Oh, yes, I have felt that, of course ; I suppose everybody feels it." "Has there never been a quarrel between your reason and conscience and your will ? Have you not felt that such a thing was the right thing to do, and have you not found that you could not do it when you tried ? And have you never felt self-condemnation?" "Why, yes, I have felt that." "What do you mean, then, when you say that you have never had a conviction of sin?" "Well, I have supposed that a conviction of sin was something that would come up like a thunder-storm ; that, first, clouds would appear above the horizon ; that then they would spread, and grow black ; that by-and-by lightning would rend the sky, and thunders would shake the heavens ; that the wind would blow fiercely ; that the rain would fall in torrents ; that the trees would swing and groan ; that the birds would fly and the animals would run ; that I should hear the voice of God condemning me as a sinner, that I should be stricken to the ground ; and that after I had wallowed there for a time in distress and anguish, there would come a shooting light from somewhere ; and that I should look up to see that the clouds were all gone, and that the trees were shedding pearly drops of water, and that the house would

not look as it had looked before ; that the oxen would be angelic, that the birds would be seraphic, and that I should have, oh ! such a blessed time !”

Well, now, I believe, verily, that when God converts poets, he converts them in that way. I have known men who had such conversions, and who were truly converted. I have seen persons who had such pictorial views of God and his government, and such peculiar conjunctions of emotion, that their experience became dramatic. Such was their temperament, that their feelings rolled and surged as the waves of the ocean do when a storm is on it, breaking and thundering on the shore. But suppose a well wanted to be stirred up, and mourned because it could not break and thunder its waves on the shore ! A well has to be a well, and an ocean has to be an ocean.

If a man of a vigorous imagination, and deep emotions, and a dramatic temperament, has been stirred to the foundations, and if by-and-by he is, by reaction, or fatigue, or both, or by some sudden opening of the truth, brought out of midnight darkness into noonday, then everything in him spheres up in radiant hues. I do not say that there are not conversions like these ; but I do say that when you take an exceptional case, a remarkable instance, a dramatic conversion, and hold it up as a type of what conversion should be, you oppress one who has not imagination. And there are many who go mourning all their days because they have not had conviction of sin—such a conviction of sin as they have been taught to suppose one must have before he can be converted. They have been trying to do their duty ; they have been trying to live according to the precepts of the Bible, but they never have had such conviction as other men have had, and they are discouraged. The high ideal which has been presented to them, and which they cannot reach, is an oppression to them. There are in this congregation men who are as good Christians as are to be seen in any church ; men who are as really in communion with God as any that are to be found in any Christian fellowship ; men of the sweetest life and the purest character ; and they stand outside of the church because they think they have not complied with the conditions of conversion, since they have not attained to a certain ideal which they suppose to be the test of a regenerated state.

I go one step farther in illustration of this subject. The New Testament contains transcendent ideals of Christian character. Nowhere else are there such conceptions of friendship and justice ; nowhere else such outreaches of the truth in its luminous purity and absoluteness ; nowhere else such examples of disinterested

bonevolence and kindness; nowhere else such injunctions to straightness of walk and conversation and fidelity to God.

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God *with all thy heart, and mind, and soul, and strength*, and thy neighbor *as thyself*."

O God! what a thought! Oh! how absolutely impossible! But such is the ideal. God be blessed that it is not one particle lower! God be blessed for the radiancy of the conception that is hid in it! But must every man, before he can hope in Christ, stand saying, "I do love God with all my heart, and mind, and soul, and strength?" You are a liar, if you say it! Never was there a man on earth that did it. Neither will there be one, till he is brought out of the flesh, and stands in the potency of spiritual life. And yet this is the bright ideal toward which we are striving, and making advancement. Can any man say that he loves his neighbor as himself—not occasionally, not by fits and starts, but steadily and habitually? Let any man tell me that who dares! There is no man who can stand the test of this ideal for an hour or a moment. One might stand it, if he were sick and on his pillow; but that would not prove anything. A man may be a saint on his back who is a devil on his feet! Take many a man who, in his house, is shielded, so that his better feelings have a chance to play, and put him in the street, and bring temptations on him, and goad him, and drive him hither and thither, and see how he will act. Have you tried to love your neighbor as yourself? Have you tried it in bankruptcy? Have you tried it when you were hard pressed, and you could take advantage? Did a man who was in debt to you and to others fail; and did you have a chance to run in and settle favorably to yourself before anybody should find it out; and did you show that you loved your neighbor as yourself, by notifying everybody, and giving everybody an equal chance?

When barn-yard fowls find a morsel of food, they "coo coo, coo," and let every fowl have a chance; but when dogs find a bit of meat, they grab it, and run and hide, that they may have it all themselves. And men take after dogs in this particular!

As I have said, the ideal of human life and character is bright and luminous. Keep it so. I would not have it dimmed. Sound it abroad with all the eloquence that you can command. But then, it is merciful. It is proclaimed by him who is so gentle that "the bruised reed he will not break, and the smoking flax he will not quench, till he bring forth judgment unto victory."

Do you recollect that exquisite passage in which Paul speaks of what he was among the Thessalonians?

"Neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of

covetousness: God is witness; neither of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us."

Was Paul better than God and Christ? He said, substantially, "I take care of you, as a nurse takes care of children? How does the nurse take care of children? Does she say to the little crippled boy, "You brat! why don't you walk as other children do?" Not at all. That boy gets more of her attention than any of the other children—if she is a true nurse. If she is a brutal, unsympathizing nurse, she says, to the dull and imperfectly organized child, "Why are you not as smart and good as that child?"—pointing to one that is bright and harmonious in its organization; but the true nurse, or the true mother, sympathizes most with those that are most in need, is most patient with those that tax and burden her most, and is most devoted to those that are the most faulty among the children under her care.

Now, the love of a true nurse or mother is the best interpretation that we have of atoning love in Jesus Christ. And the disposition of the Saviour is, while holding up the ideal of Christian life and character to men, to help them in striving after it, and to say to them, "Imperfect you are, but you are trying to attain perfection, and that is all I ask. I take you, and will aid you; and all that you lack, I will pass by. I will forget it." What becomes of it? What becomes of anything that you forget? God says, "I will remember your sin no more. I will cast it into the depths of the sea."

There is, throughout the Old Testament and the New, this infinite tenderness and lenity in dealing with men who are striving for an ideal, which makes the Bible the most wonderful of books. It is a most wonderful book, not only in exalting the conceptions of duty, but also in its treatment of men who are not able to reach those conceptions. On one side, it keeps the picture radiant, so that the eye is dazzled in looking at it, and turns toward the ground; on the other side, with arms about us, and with kindly words, as a schoolmaster, it helps us to Christ; and Christ, as our elder brother, brings us to our Father. Especially the friendliness, the exaltation, the nobility, the gentleness, the encouragement, the helpfulness, and the beautifulness of the New Testament, make it the most wonderful book ever thought of.

Do men threaten to throw away that Book on the ground that it is not inspired? I would like to know what inspiration is, if

you do not find it in the Bible. Where else than in that Book can you find a system running through six thousand years, so uniform in every part; so analogous in its different parts, reaching from lower conditions to higher ones; and marked with such marvelous illustrations, and such an extraordinary application of educating forces, tempered by forbearing love and mercy? Where was there ever such an exhibition of moral truth, outside of the Bible? Nature is rigorous, unyielding, inexorable. It says, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "For the soul that sinneth, I have found a ransom," saith God. He dealeth with us as with sons; and though he will chastise us, and give us pain, and cause tears of anguish to flow from our eyes, it is that he may make us partakers of the divine nature.

I cannot bear to have the Bible go into disuse. I hate to see men fighting with the Bible. I turn away from the scene with unbounded disgust. The Word of God is like a garden.

When soldiers have lost their health in battle, or from the exposures of climate, the Government establishes sanitariums at favorable points, where these soldiers, crippled or broken down, may go and recover their strength. There are beautiful hospital buildings, delightful grounds, and exquisite flowers provided for their comfort and enjoyment. The conveniences by which they are surrounded, the beauty of the scene, and the fragrance which, day and night, fills the atmosphere, conspire to make their condition most enjoyable and satisfactory. A thousand men go there; and at once they fall into wrangling about questions of architectural propriety. "This building," say some of them, "is faulty in its construction. I can prove that it has violated the very fundamental rules of mechanics." And so they get into a quarrel on the subject of architecture and mechanics. "I never saw," these fault-finders go on to say, "such incongruous elements combined in a building." Another set go into the garden, and, instead of plucking the sweet flowers and delicious fruits, and enjoying them, they fall to quarreling about them. One man says, "Do you know that Linnæus and other botanists differ so and so, in respect to such and such plants? Which side do you take?" One says, "I take this side;" another says, "I take that." And they go to work to prove that certain flowers have so many stamens and petals and pistils, and that certain fruits have such and such peculiarities; and they commence tearing the flowers to pieces, and the apples and pears and quinces fly in every direction, hitting one man here and another there. At length, fatigued, exhausted, they take a respite; but when they have rested themselves, they go at it again. And they renew the

conflict from day to day. The sanitarium and everything in it were provided for their comfort ; and yet they make them a source of contention and unhappiness. The garden was prepared for their delight, and they destroy it. They vex themselves, and annoy each other, in trying to settle scientific questions.

Now, is not that the way the Bible has been used ? Do you not find the Arminian, the Calvinist, the Arian, and the Trinitarian, quarreling about its contents ? Do you not find that, all the way through the history of the Church, the Word of God has been a great field on which hostile armies have been organized, and fierce battles have been fought ? Have not controversies the most furious been carried on over it by its adherents, age after age ? That Book, full of sympathy and consolation ; that Book, full of aspiration and yearning ; that Book, full of help and comfort ; that Book, full of forbearance and friendship, full of light and joy, full of gentleness and mercy,—that Book has been the worst used book that was ever on the globe. But God will save it. He has saved it thus far, and he will save it to the end. The time is coming when the conflicts concerning it will cease, and it will stand redeemed from the injurious usage of days gone by. Men are beginning to apply to it those great rules of historic criticism and discrimination which will redeem it.

The Word of God is the book of the common people ; it is the working-man's book ; it is the child's book ; it is the slave's book ; it is the book of every creature that is down-trodden ; it is a book that carries with it the leaven of God's soul ; it is a book that tends to make men larger and better and sweeter, and that succors them all through life ; and do you suppose it is going to be lost out of the world ? When the Bible is lost out of the world, it will be because there are no men in it who are in trouble and need succoring ; no men who are oppressed and need release ; no men who are in darkness and need light ; no men who are hungry and need food ; no men who are sinning and need mercy ; no men who are lost and need the salvation of God.

Let us, therefore, take the Word of God as our friend, and hold it to our heart, and make it the man of our counsel, our guide, the lamp to our feet, the light to our path. Use it, as God meant it to be used, as the soul's food and the soul's joy, and it shall be your life's rest.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

WE thank thee, O Lord our God, for those bounties that are new every morning, and fresh every moment; that find us out everywhere—in the darkness and in the light; at home and abroad. Even in sickness we are sustained in the arms of divine mercy. In disasters and troubles we are still with God. We rejoice that to all who know thee, to all who can appreciate thy presence in the great world outside of us, to all who experience thy presence in their own inward consciousness, to all who can take thy Word and transmit and transmute its sentences into their own understanding and knowledge—we rejoice that to all these thou art a God of infinite goodness, and mercy, and truth. Thou art a God of inspiration, and upbuilding, and helpfulness. Thou art stimulating to development, and thou art comforting to those who are weary with striving. Thou dost pity those who have fallen down. Thou dost have compassion upon all mankind. Thou knowest that the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who hath sustained him in hope. Thou knowest that the whole creation is groaning and travailing. Thou knowest that there is a life of which all our sufferings here are but the birth-pains, and toward which hands helpless, even, are reached forth; toward which ten thousand endeavors are co-operating everywhere. Thou art not alone the God of the Church, here and there shut up in houses that men have built. Nor art thou alone the God of nations, parceled and appropriated selfishly. Nor art thou alone the God of those that are civilized. Nor art thou alone the God of those that are Christianized. Thou art the God of the whole earth. Thy compassion is toward all thy creatures. We could not live, if we did not believe that thou who dost sit turning the shadow and the darkness upon all the myriads that are wrestling with time and chance art mindful of them. We could not live, while men sigh, and groan, and long, and yearn, and know not what to do, if we believed that thou didst permit the wild elements and dark shapes to sweep through the world, and didst not care for those who suffered from these things. How couldst thou do it, great God of goodness? We know that thou dost care. All that we know of thee interprets thee. All thy greatness and bounty, all thy gentleness and helpfulness, all thy sweetness and purity, all the light of thy nature, all thy mercifulness and goodness, teach us that thou dost care for every living creature. Thou hast thyself said that thou dost care for the sparrow; and dost thou not care for men? Thou dost count the hairs of our head, and is the head from which they spring of no value?

We rejoice in thee, universal Father, God over all, blessed forever, and forever blessing! We do not seek to pierce thy counsels, nor to understand all thy ways. Thou must be higher than our understanding, or thou couldst not be God. If we worshiped on a level with our comprehension, we could not worship thee. If we compassed thee with our thought, thou wouldst be no larger than we are; but the lines of thy being transcend the reach of our understanding, so that none by searching can find thee out, nor understand the Almighty to perfection. Something of thy nature we know, and we are blessed in every particle that we know; but the orb, the great circuit of thy being, compared with which life on the earth is but as a drop of dew compared to the globe—who shall know this, and yet be a man? To take in the whole amplitude of thy nature were to destroy ourselves. We could not contain it.

We rejoice that there is so much of thee; that thou art so far beyond our experience of earthly life; that thou art so much better than the best; so much nobler than the most noble; so much sweeter than the dearest; so much wiser than those that are the most experienced and the wisest among men. As high as the heaven is above the earth, so high are thy thoughts above our thoughts; so high are thy mercies above our mercies. We rejoice in thee—in all that we understand of thee. We have unlimited faith that that which is yet to be revealed shall be infinitely better than that which has been revealed; that it shall weave itself on to the things which we comprehend; and that then our knowledge, irradiated by the more perfect light of the other life, shall seem to us not less true than now, but more glorious in its truth, when all that lies beyond shall wax greater and more potential. Blessed be thy name, thou who art all in all, that thou art sovereign; that thou canst not be turned from thy course; and that the everlasting decrees of thy providence and mercy hold on their way, too high for men to batter, or for any artillery of their reason to destroy. Thou art God, and canst not take counsel with any, because thou givest counsel to all. We rejoice that thou art supreme. We could not rest, if it were power alone; nor if it were wisdom; nor if it were justice; but as it is love, bearing in itself justice, and

wisdom, and power, and truth, and goodness, we have implicit trust. We put ourselves into thy hands. We put our life there. Living or dying, we are the Lord's. We know no other life than that which we have in thee. We have joined ourselves to thy life. We would not join ourselves to that which is in this world. We have no ambition except to work in the great eternal channels of thy providence; to do that which thou art doing, and which thou dost desire us to do; to live as long as it pleaseth thee, and to die when it suits thee. And then we believe that we shall be, not thrown into annihilation and darkness, but gathered into the higher company of the spirits of just men made perfect. And there we shall look back, to smile over tears; to rejoice over defeats; to marvel at our wanderings; and to see how, all the way, thou wert guiding us by a silver thread that never once broke; that whatever sorrow, or disaster, or suffering thou didst send upon us was for our good; that thou didst convert all the evil which thou didst permit to overtake us into final benefit. We shall behold thee as thou art, and thy way on earth, in the light and glory of thine interpretation.

And now we pray that the comfort of God may be with every one of us. Behold, to-day, we pray thee, those who are poor, that they may have the unspeakable riches of thy grace. We pray for all those who are harassed and vexed in their affairs, that they may find, beyond and above all human happiness, that peace which passeth all understanding. We pray for all that are alone, or lonely, among men, that they may have the presence of God. Thou, Jesus, wert without companionship on earth, and yet thou didst say that thou wert not alone, because the Father was with thee; and wilt thou be with all those who need companionship, and have it not. Be with the young; with the wandering; with those who are unrestrained, and who are progressing farther and farther in evil; and turn them back to that which is right and noble; and may they know the compassion of God, and trust in his mercy and love.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt be with all those who are burdened and troubled because they have done wrong, or are doing wrong. O thou that dost behold the best as ever doing imperfectly and wrongfully, have compassion upon the great world's population, that are striving upward with infinite infirmities toward infinite perfection. And we beseech of thee that thou wilt give to us all the heart that thou hast in thine own self; with gentleness; with forbearance; with kindness, one to another; with forgiving love; with compassion.

Grant that we may look, not with the eyes of animals upon animals, to rend and tear. May we rather have breathed into us the spirit of our Father in heaven. May we desire to suffer rather than to cause suffering.

We pray that thou wilt fill thy Churches, everywhere, with that spirit of Christ which led him to bow down his head in sorrow and darkness—Him that stood in the utmost glory—that he might bring to the erring and lost light, and life, and heavenly salvation. May there be the pitifulness of Christ in all his disciples. May all thy Churches throw down the battered walls and the artillery with which they have vexed and annoyed men, and give peace to them. Where the landscape has been torn up by camps and warring soldiers; where all things have been disfigured or destroyed by violence, give us back again the sweet possession of the flowers and fruit of that peace which thy Word was sent to bring to this world.

We pray that thou wilt fulfill thy promises which thou hast made toward the race. May we understand thee better, and be more patient in waiting for thee; and may we never have a doubt that, in the end, thou wilt gather all thine own, that the whole world will be redeemed, and that the new heaven and the new earth will dwell together in righteousness.

Hear us in these our petitions, and answer us, through Christ Jesus our Lord. *Amen.*

PLYMOUTH PULPIT.

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